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Viewing cable 07MEXICO1068, ANTI-DRUG OPS EXTENDED TO EIGHT STATES

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MEXICO1068	2007-03-02 13:09	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Mexico

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MEXICO 001068

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2017

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SUBJECT: ANTI-DRUG OPS EXTENDED TO EIGHT STATES

REF: MEXICO 983

Summary

¶1. (C) In the first three months of his presidency, President Calderon has initiated "surge operations" involving the mass deployment of federal police and troops in anti-drug operations in a total of 8 of Mexico's 32 states. When measured strictly by the quantity of drugs seized and the number of drug traffickers arrested, the operations' results have been modest, leading some critics to dismiss them as an exercise in political grandstanding. Nevertheless, even if the immediate results of the operations have been modest, they have sent several strong, symbolic messages. First, his willingness to stake his prestige on these operations in only the second week of his presidency conveyed to the Mexican public that he would lend the war on crime more than just lip service, a welcome change after the torpor of the latter Fox years. Indeed, his aggressive tactics against public insecurity may well explain his relatively high public approval ratings, and the political capital he has gained through these operations may prove valuable as he seeks more fundamental law enforcement reforms. Moreover, his willingness to use the full authority and resources of the presidency against drug cartels has sent tremors through Mexico's underworld, clearly catching the cartels off guard. Although the operations seem to have been effective in curbing drug-related killings in the states where there is a continuing military presence, organized crime-style killings have spiked in at least three formerly peaceful states not targeted by the GOM, suggesting the surge operations are causing criminal syndicates to shift their operations elsewhere. At this point we will be looking to see whether the GOM uses the momentum it has gained from these surge operations to attack the very pillars of the illegal drug industry, making it economically unsustainable. End Summary.

Operation Conjunta Michoacan

¶2. (SBU) The anti-drug offensive began on December 8, exactly one week after Calderon's inauguration, when the GOM sent 6,784 troops and federal police to his troubled home state of Michoacan. Their mission was to eradicate drug plantations, intercept drug cargos and wanted criminals, execute arrest warrants, and dismantle points of drug retailing. On January 3, Defense Secretary Guillermo Galvan summarized the results to date as follows: 5,023 fields of marijuana destroyed; 80 arrests; the seizure of 127 firearms, 32,000 rounds of ammunition, 41 grenades, and US\$4,000 in cash. Over half of the troops sent to Michoacan were devoted to eradicating marijuana plants, but the number of arrests and the fact that none of those detained was a prominent trafficker compelled authorities to explain that tracking down and arresting drug bosses had not been a priority in Operation Michoacan. However, Public Security Secretary Genaro Garcia Luna said the presence of troops in the state has reduced drug-related killings by 72 percent.

Operation Tijuana

¶3. (SBU) One month later, the GOM deployed a force of 3,926 officers to the border city Tijuana -- home to the cartel of the Felix Arellano clan. One of its first acts was to disarm the entire 2,000-strong local police force and send their weapons for ballistic tests to determine whether they had been used in any crimes. (Note: The federal authorities believe that drug gangs reign free in Tijuana due to widespread collusion with local police. End Note.) In the first two-and-a-half weeks of Operation Tijuana, drug gang killings fell to less than half of last year's average. No arrests of leading cartel figures were reported.

Operation Sierra Madre

¶4. (U) That same day, January 9, a force of more than 9,000 officers began to arrive in the area known as the "Golden Triangle," which straddles the states of Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa. The undeclared objective of this effort was the capture of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who has been deemed responsible for much of the inter-gang warfare since his jailbreak in 2001. Guzman's Sinaloa cartel has violently disputed control of northern markets with the Gulf cartel, headed by the recently extradited Osiel Cardenas.

Operation Conjunta Guerrero

¶5. (SBU) On January 10, a contingent of 7,600 troops and police began to take up positions in Acapulco and other parts of the state of Guerrero for the forth major anti-drug operation. Both the Guerrero and Sierra Madre operations were officially announced January 19. On January 22 the GOM summed up the results in terms that make comparison to the January 3 report difficult. It said that more than 1,500 hectares of drug crops had been destroyed, more than 32 tons of marijuana and 2.2 tons of cocaine seized, and "dozens" of arrests made.

¶6. (SBU) The media received the GOM's January 22 report with much skepticism, and highlighted that since the launch of the Michoacan operation only one prominent drug trafficker had been captured: Pedro Diaz Prada, boss of the eponymous cartel, which is chiefly devoted to producing and distributing marijuana, and is considerably smaller than any of the 5 dominant cartels. He was arrested on January 16 in the southern state of Oaxaca -- where no major anti-drug operation was under way.

Anti-drug operation expands to Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas

¶7. (U) Since December, Calderon has ordered a total of about 27,000 troops and paramilitary police into the six states of Michoacan, Guerrero, Durango, Sinaloa, Baja California and Chihuahua, where the turf wars between drug gangs claimed over 2,000 lives last year. As of February 18, security officials claimed to have eradicated virtually as much opium poppy as marijuana in the six states: 3,873 hectares of marijuana and 3,324 hectares of opium poppies since the offensives started on December 8.

¶8. (U) On January 29 and February 18, respectively, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas became the seventh and eighth states targeted by Calderon's counter-narcotics offensive, with a deployment of 3,300 troops and federal police in and around the cities of Monterrey, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros. Defense Secretary Guillermo Galvan said the joint operation would focus on key points along the main trafficking routes.

Recent successes

¶9. (U) The GOM was able to claim three recent successes, two of which took place in the states targeted for massive troop deployments. On February 6, in Monterrey the authorities announced the arrest of 4 members of a "financial cell" of the Juarez cartel and the seizure of US\$162,000 in cash. The cash seizure was directly related to a tip provided to GOM authorities by the DEA. That same day at Mexico City's international airport, police seized a shipment of about one ton of cocaine from a commercial aircraft that had arrived from Venezuela. This seizure was also the result of intelligence provided by DEA. Another ton of cocaine was intercepted by army troops as it was being trucked through Sonora towards the U.S. border.

Cartels strike back

¶10. (U) While in the earlier operations there were only a

few clashes between the government forces and the gunmen, since late January the gangs have been striking back. On January 27, one police officer was killed and two were injured in an ambush in Nuevo Leon. That same day in Yucatan (outside the main areas of operations), a police and fire station was attacked with grenades. On January 29 in Monterrey an officer of the Agencia Estatal de Investigaciones (AEI), the state investigative police, was gunned down in the street, becoming the fifth police fatality of the month.

¶11. (U) Far more serious were two back-to-back attacks staged on February 6 in Acapulco by a team of gunmen disguised as soldiers: they killed 4 police officers and 3 civilian employees of the police. The chief prosecutor of Guerrero state, Eduardo Murueta, complained publicly that the attackers were able to successfully pass themselves off as members of the military because the federal government's mistrust of state authorities had led to a complete lack of coordination between the military and local law enforcement. That same day in Sinaloa gunmen murdered the coordinator of the state judicial police's elite Unidad Modelo, Jorge Valdes Fierro.

¶12. (C) Although the intensity of the inter-gang turf wars has diminished since December, they have not ceased, even in the areas where the army has been deployed. On February 12 in Ciudad Juarez five bodies were found, bearing the "signature" of drug gang executions. Moreover, the murder of a prominent member of the PRD on January 15 in Durango, the attempted assassination of a PRI federal deputy, Horacio Garza, on February 19 in Tamaulipas, and the killing of four members of a dance band in Michoacan on February 18, show that the security situation is not improving despite the GOM's large-scale offensives.

GOM response to recent attacks

¶13. (SBU) The security cabinet met twice on February 20 to evaluate the counter-narcotics operations underway, as well as to consider new strategies in light of the recent attack against Horacio Garza. Defense Secretary Guillermo Galvan claimed that the army had already hit the drug gangs hard and this was why they were retaliating so fiercely. He also warned that more such attacks were likely. Separately, Attorney General Medina Mora emphasized that the war would take "years" to win and said that more money and resources would be needed. He also said that the GOM did not plan additional joint operations in other states, in the interests of focusing on the operations currently underway. (Note: In a February 16 meeting with visiting Secretary of Homeland Security Chertoff, Medina Mora said the GOM understood that surge operations and extraditions were not enough to defeat the cartels. He said that his staff would be seeking to understand the cartels from a "microeconomic" perspective, to understand how they source and ship contraband and how they buy off low level officials, in order to arm a strategy aimed at making the cartels economically unsustainable. End note.)

The "cucarracha" effect

¶14. (U) Although the operations seem to have been effective in curbing drug-related killings in the states where there is a continuing military presence, organized crime-style killings have spiked in at least three states not targeted by the GOM and that were formerly immune to the menace. (Note: The local press has been calling this the "cucarracha" ("cockroach") effect, suggesting that the fumigation of pests in one area, only moves them to another area.) Recent news reports suggest that the operations may be pushing the drug trade into areas which had previously been unaffected by drug-related violence, including Aguascalientes, Oaxaca, and the Yucatan. On February 19, the Governor of Aguascalientes, Luis Armando Reynoso Fermat, said that drug gangs had been building up their operations in the state. Last week, four

state policemen were gunned down by a gang in Aguascalientes. With few major drug traffickers arrested, the cartels may be shifting their operations to states not targeted by federal authorities.

Public opinion

¶15. (U) According to a poll conducted by Consulta Mitofsky (published on February 14) the public tends to disagree with the widespread view that the results of the mass deployments are meager. Only 23.2 percent of the respondents said they had been a failure, with another 13 percent saying they were unable to assess the outcome. Overall, 47.1 percent indicated their approval of the operations, and no fewer than 83.9 percent said it had been right to entrust a key role in them to the military. About 75 percent of those surveyed said they would like to see their own cities targeted by operations similar to those launched since December.

Comment

¶16. (C) Some critics have dismissed the surge operations as political grandstanding, suggesting that they have yielded little in terms of concrete results. However, we believe the message Calderon is sending is important, even if it is partly symbolic. There is little question that he has caught the cartels off guard, many of which have had to modify their operations. Moreover, by demonstrating his willingness to stake his prestige on aggressive counternarcotics tactics -- something the public has long wanted -- he may be winning the political capital he will need to advance the fundamental anticrime reforms he has long advocated. At this point, the real test will be whether Calderon can sustain and institutionalize the enforcement pressure he has brought to bear, both by carrying out small-scale intelligence operations and systematic efforts to attack the economic viability of the cartels.

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